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# Developing Pragmatic Competence While Teaching Communication Skills and Soft Skills for Students' Overall Personality Development

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**Abstract:** *The approach of teaching English language initially, was to introduce linguistic structures with the idea that the learners would get a strong hold in the knowledge of grammar to understand the language. Thus, students who went through the above learning process did understand the grammatical units but failed to address a significant element of language learning, i.e., communication skills. In any kind of conversation, one finds that the speakers convey most of the communicational content by way of implication rather than by explicit statements. In fact, it is not possible to maintain a conversation without the use of implicit meaning. A heartening fact is that there is a lot of pragmatic information that adult learners possess, and the sad thing is that they don't always use what they know. There is thus a clear role for educational intrusion here, not with the purpose of providing learners with new information but to make them aware of what they know already and encourage them to use their transferable mother tongue pragmatic knowledge in second language contexts. Learning method of most engineering students and teaching method of most engineering professors are incompatible in several proportions. Most of the engineering students are visual, sensing, inductive, and active, and some are most creative, resulting in mismatches and poor student performance, professorial frustration, and a loss to society of many potentially excellent engineers. Therefore, the present paper aims to find out the nature of impact of communication skills and soft skills training on students.*

**Key words:** *Soft skills training, hard skills, communication skills, teachers, education, Pragmatics Paul Grice's Cooperative Principle, Geoffrey Leech's Politeness Principle.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

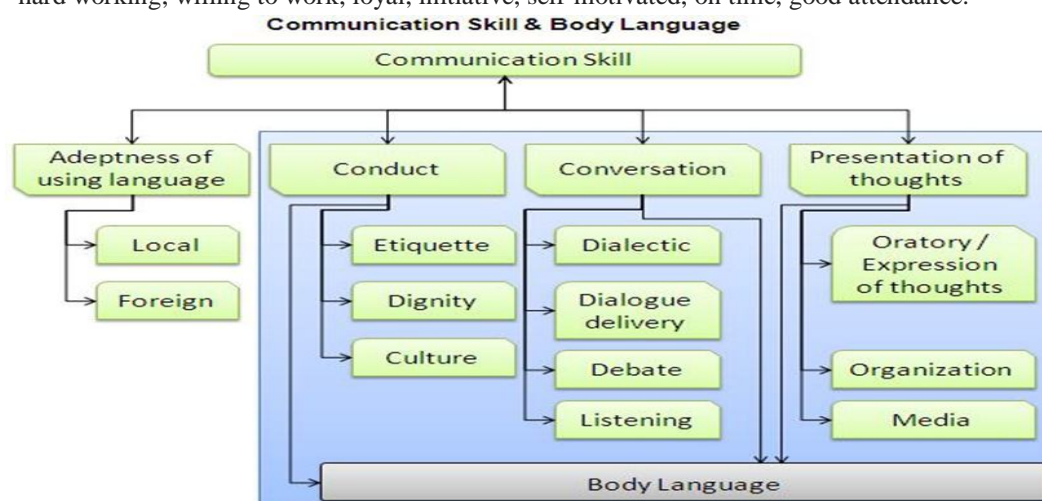
The present paper tries to convey that there is a need to develop the ability to understand the functional aspect of language and not just the level of skills that need to be developed. The ability to encode or decode meaning appropriately in an appropriate situation. The emphasis must be on learning the functions of language. i.e., the communicative purpose for which language is used. Therefore, Language learning should be experiential and must aim at developing learners' communicative competence. The task-based approach to language learning emphasizes learning to communicate through purposeful interaction.

However, as far as Communication skills are concerned, the issue becomes more and more complicated. In the English-speaking world, Language proficiency is the ability to speak, read and write Standard English in a way business people communicate. The researcher in her teaching experience has observed that lacking in specific language communication skills among engineering students and the problems in the teaching of the courses at colleges, has resulted from inappropriate teaching materials and instructional techniques, lack of English Language Teaching (ELT) – trained professionals and poor teaching methods. Many believe that the English course prescribed by universities for professional colleges is competitive, as they cater to the needs of the target group. Warier, (2007), implies that the teachers of English at professional colleges should undergo paradigm shift and cease to be mere teachers of grammar and structure; they are expected to play the role of communication and soft skills trainers, which is essentially the pragmatics of communication. Scarcella (1990), reports results of paper where she found language difficulties presented by language speakers when they acquire “inadequate” conversational rules. These difficulties caused by the lack of conversational rules which may lead to failures, misunderstandings, etc. The author states that “communication difficulties may also result in psychological discomfort, which also means less acquisition of the target language” (1990:284). Scarcely also highlights the role of the classroom in motivating students to continue acquiring language and language patterns even when having conversational problems and in helping them see those problems as something natural. For the author, “providing exposure to successful interactional styles and emphasizing real communication in the classroom may help students in formal classes, develop conversational competence” (1990:184).

### A. Soft Skills

According to Wikipedia, the following are the top ten soft skills,

- 1) Communication – oral, speaking capability, written, presenting, listening.
- 2) Courtesy – manners, etiquette, business etiquette, gracious, saying please and thank you, being respectful.
- 3) Flexibility – adaptability, willing to change, lifelong learner, accepting new things, adjusting, teachable.
- 4) Integrity – honest, ethical, high morals, has personal values, does what's right.
- 5) Interpersonal skills – nice, personable, sense of humor, friendly, nurturing, empathetic, has self-control, patient, sociability, warmth, social skills.
- 6) Positive attitude – optimistic, enthusiastic, encouraging, happy, confident.
- 7) Professionalism – businesslike, well-dressed, appearance, poised.
- 8) Responsibility – accountable, reliable, gets the job done, resourceful, self-disciplined, wants to do well, conscientious, common sense.
- 9) Teamwork – cooperative, gets along with others, agreeable, supportive, helpful, collaborative.
- 10) Work ethic – hard working, willing to work, loyal, initiative, self-motivated, on time, good attendance.



(An overview of essential factors shaping a person's communication skills.)

The above figure displays a collection of aspects that spans from basic skills of using a language, which in multilingual societies like India where every state has its own language and may not be taken for granted on advanced topics like Dialectic or Oratory skills. Minimum requirements for a graduate of a college or university should be that the student must be proficient in spoken and written language, a certain amount of dignity must reflect in conversation as well as in his body language and adequate discussion skills.

### B. Pragmatics

Pragmatics is still relatively new to language teachers, who appreciate its difficulty in comparison to grammar, which is traditionally embedded in TEFL methodologies. Thomas (1983: 97) gives us two explanations of this situation: (i) that pragmatic description is not as precise as grammar in accounting for linguistic competence; and (ii) that pragmatics is "a delicate area and it is not immediately obvious how it can be taught." Grammar consists of rules, and when a speaker follows the rules of grammar, s/he will speak correctly. The situation in pragmatics is not as clear, for in pragmatics we can only come across principles, which apply differently in different contexts of language use; apply in variable degrees; can conflict with one another; and can be contravened without self-denial of the kind of activity which they control (Leech 1983: 8).

### C. Politeness in Classroom Discourse

Politeness is not only a universally valued virtue, but also a widely employed strategy to achieve tactful and effective communication. Furthermore, politeness can help the speaker to negotiate his/her position in society, eliminate conflicts and facilitate cooperation. Politeness is thus important for classroom discourse for two main reasons. By using politeness strategies, the teacher can create a classroom atmosphere that establishes congenial and respectful relationships between the teacher and the



student(s). In such a polite atmosphere, the learner can feel respected and trusted, and thus feel unthreatened or embarrassed by his/her own mistakes, facilitating his/her involvement in various classroom activities. Accordingly, the politeness of the teacher has a great impact on the learner's language achievement and success. On the top of that, learners do not only learn by explicit teaching, but they also adopt strategies that their teacher is expressing implicitly. This basically means that when the teacher uses the politeness strategies in his/her verbal cues, students can adopt those strategies themselves.

Grice's Cooperative Principles (CP) exercises great influence on pragmatic studies. However, there still exist lots of incidents that CP can't explain. As a remedy for CP, Leech (1983) formulates 'Politeness Principle' (PP), which are presumed to interpret indirect ways to say things. To Leech, politeness is motivation to do things above. According to Leech (Leech 1983: 133), various politeness strategies are taken to mitigate the face threatening activities effectively:

Tact-maxim: Minimize the cost to other; maximize the benefit to other.

Generosity maxim: Minimize benefit to self, maximize cost to self.

Approbation maxim: Minimize dispraise of other, maximize praise of other.

Modesty maxim: Minimize praise of self, maximize dispraise of self.

Agreement maxim: Minimize disagreement between self and other; maximize agreement between self and other.

Sympathy maxim: Minimize antipathy between self and other; maximize sympathy between self and other.

Thus, Politeness is: the expression of the speakers' intention to mitigate face threats carried by certain face threatening acts toward another (Mills, 2003, p. 6). a battery of social skills whose goal is to ensure everyone feels affirmed in a social interaction (Foley, William. 1997)

Therefore, if Soft Skills with a pragmatic approach are to be inculcated in an individual, one needs to consider the important factors for shaping the character as well as skills of communication in an individual.

#### *D. Educators/Teachers/Trainers Contribution Required in Enhancing Students' Soft Skills:*

The first criterion for the educational institutions must be to identify the needs of the students measure their weaknesses and then take effective steps to cover them up with the required training. They are also expected to take the cognizance of the students' present level of Soft Skills by undertaking a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis of each student. Students must be encouraged to read books that are focused on improving Soft Skills, attend training courses, take part in debates and socialize with their peers. The facilitators must take the following objectives into consideration, i.e.,

- 1) To make the learners realize that there are well established pragmatic conventions for English communication.
- 2) To make them aware of dialect differences, identity considerations, contextual constraints and cultural sensitivity.
- 3) To device more interactive and collaborative pedagogical formats for developing students' proficiency in strategies of language negotiation.

Thus, there is a need to develop the ability to understand the functional aspect of language. The emphasis must be on learning the functions of language. i.e., the communicative purpose for which language is used.

Therefore, Language learning should be experiential and should aim at developing learners' communicative competence. The task-based approach to language learning emphasizes learning to communicate through purposeful interaction, exploring issues and providing solutions. Thus, grammar and structure, vocabulary and tone, politeness principles, critical thinking and creativity with language skills and their functions can be provided to the learners for executing meaningful communication.

## **II. CONCLUSION**

Learning method of most engineering students and teaching method of most engineering professors are incompatible in several proportions. Most of the engineering students are visual, sensing, inductive, and active, and some are most creative, resulting in mismatches and poor student performance, professorial frustration, and a loss to society of many potentially excellent engineers. Therefore, the present paper aims to find out the nature of impact of communication skills and soft skills training on students which would be measured by comparing their communication skills levels before and after the intervention. Thus, the changes would be genuine and positive to identify the importance of mastery of soft skills. The pedagogy of teaching the language must be:

- A. Presentations or discussion techniques to relay information drawn from paper on pragmatic issues to students.
- B. Provide detailed information on the participants, their status, the situations, and the speech events that are occurring.
- C. The information provided to students in awareness raising activities will help learners awareness of pragmatic features in the target language. Considering the present scenario, the lack of appropriate and effective skills, affect the employability of the



students in the job market. Thus, the present paper highlights the following insights to purport while dealing with the teaching of communication and soft skills. They are:

- D. The papered purports that insertion of pragmatic components in teaching pedagogy would help the learners in understanding the target language better, thus, improving their soft skills
- E. Students need to be groomed well from the beginning of their courses for better understanding of the expectations of the employers.
- F. The syllabus must also be updated from time to time, based on the need of the industry
- G. Innovative teaching style and motivating approach of teaching, would surely enhance the proficiency, body language and confidence of the students.
- H. There needs to be a measurement tool to place the gradual improvement of the students. To conclude, the researcher would like to assert that exposing students to need based skills training sessions is likely to result in enhanced communication skills and soft skills for their employability and career growth.



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